

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8022

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

AMEMBASSY LIMA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 3668

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, EC

SUBJECT: POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ECUADOR

REF: QUITO A-10 JAN 16, 1973; QUITO 1096 MARCH 7, 1973

1. SUMMARY: THE CONTINUED INEFFECTIVENESS, SIGNS OF FATIGUE, AND GROWING CORRUPTION IN THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAVE FINALLY LED SOME POLITICIANS TO RAISE THE ISSUE OF THE NEED FOR POLITICAL CHANGE. ONE GROUP HAS ATTEMPTED TO FORM A UNITED FRONT WHOSE PROGRAM CALLS FOR AN END TO THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND FOR ELECTIONS. THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAS REJECTED THESE DEMANDS. FORMER PRESIDENT CAMILO PONCE HAS OBLIQUELY OFFERED HIMSELF FOR THE ROLE OF INTERIM PRESIDENT FOR THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION. GIVEN THE PRECEDENT FOR SUCH A DEVELOPMENT, IT IS NOT A WHOLLY IMPROBABLE SCENARIO IN THE LONG RUN. END SUMMARY.

2. THE REGIME HAS BEEN TREADING WATER SINCE IT CAME TO POWER. IT NOW HAS A TIRED LOOK ABOUT IT. THE QUESTION OF ITS STAYING POWER HAS NOW ARISEN.

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3. SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT ARE NOT WELL (THE

FOREIGN MINISTER LUCIO PAREDES, THE MINISTER OF LABOR
BG MOREJON, AND THE CINC OF THE NAVY ADMIRAL VASQUEZ).
MANY SENIOR OFFICIALS ARE COMPLAINING ABOUT BEING TIRED
PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.

4. THE LEVEL OF CORRUPTION APPEARS TO BE INCREASING AT
A RATHER RAPID RATE MOST VISIBLY IN RELATION TO
PETROLEUM AND WEAPONS PURCHASING. THE APPEARANCE OF
CORRUPTION IS A RELATIVELY NEW DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORY
OF THIS REGIME. ITS EFFECTS ARE CERTAIN TO UNDERMINE
PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND PROBABLY OFFICIAL SELF-CONFIDENCE
AS WELL. THIS CORRUPTION SHOULD SPEED THE DEGENERATION
OF THE REGIME -- A SITUATION WHICH IS ALREADY APPARENT
IN THE PHYSICAL SENSE AND IS NOW BECOMING VISIBLE IN A
MORAL ONE.

5. THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS,
NEVER ONE OF ITS STRONG POINTS, HAS DIMINISHED --
PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THE INCREASE IN CORRUPTION. A GOOD
EXAMPLE IS THE REGIME'S REACTION TO THE LEAK ON
AGRARIAN REFORM (QUITO 3125). ANOTHER IS ITS INABILITY
TO MAKE DECISIONS ON WEAPONS SYSTEMS PROCUREMENT. NO ONE
WANTS TO TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR A DECISION FOR FEAR
THAT HE MAY BE ATTACKED OR EVEN PROSECUTED FOR HIS ACTS
BY THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION. HENCE THE INCREASING
RELUCTANCE TO MAKE DECISIONS IS AN INDICATION OF THE
EVAPORATION OF OFFICIAL SELF-CONFIDENCE. ONE PROMINENT
COLUMNIST HAS SUGGESTED THAT THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, INSTEAD
OF ABOLISHING THE SPECIAL TRIBUNALS, SHOULD USE THEM
AGAINST THE OFFICIALS OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.

6. RECENTLY PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ HAS BEEN UNABLE TO
PERSUADE SENIOR ARMY OFFICERS TO TAKE GOVERNMENT JOBS.
THIS RELUCTANCE TO SERVE MAY BE FURTHER EVIDENCE OF
FATIGUE. IT MAY ALSO REPRESENT A LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN
THE FUTURE OF THE REGIME.

7. IN THE FACE OF THIS EVIDENCE OF THE MILITARY GOVERN-
MENT'S WEAKNESS, POLITICAL ACTIVITY HAS INCREASED
MODERATELY. POLITICIANS ARE SHOWING MORE INTEREST IN
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THE NEXT GOVERNMENT AND MORE CONFIDENCE THAT IT WILL
NOT BE A MILITARY ONE.

8. THE MOST RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT ALONG THESE
LINES WAS THE ANNOUNCEMENT, BY A GROUP OF POLITICIANS,
LED BY CONSERVATIVES AND RADICAL-LIBERALS, THAT IT WAS
TIME FOR THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT TO CALL ELECTIONS AND
THAT THEY WERE FORMING A NATIONAL RESTORATION FRONT.

SUCH A SHOW OF UNITY IS UNUSUAL. MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, THE CONCENTRATION OF POPULAR FORCES, AT A RECENT MEETING CHAIRED BY ASSAD BUCARAM, STATED IN A PRESS RELEASE THAT IT WAS TIME FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY AND CALLED FOR ELECTIONS. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT BUCARAM HAS PUBLICLY ENTERED THE POLITICAL ARENA SINCE THE COUP OF FEBRUARY 1972. FINALLY FORMER PRESIDENT CAMILO PONCE, IN A FRONT-PAGED INTERVIEW IN EL TELEGRAFO OF GUAYAQUIL, SUPPORTED THE IDEA OF A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY AND RATHER OBVIOUSLY MADE HIMSELF AVAILABLE IN CASE AN INTERIM PRESIDENT MIGHT BE NEEDED. (THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE LAST MILITARY JUNTA.)

9. IN THE FACE OF THIS TENTATIVE AND LONG-DELAYED POLITICAL ACTIVITY, THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD NOT SET A LIMIT TO ITS TERM SINCE IT HAD NOT YET ACCOMPLISHED ITS GOALS. THE SPOKESMAN ADDED THAT THE REGIME WOULD CRUSH ANY ATTEMPT TO OVERTHROW IT, BUT HE DID NOT MAKE THE USUAL CONTEMPTUOUS REFERENCES TO POLITICIANS WHICH WERE PRESENT IN THE PREVIOUS REFUSAL OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT TO SET A LIMIT TO ITS TERM. CHAPLIN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUITO 3668

10. SPECULATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE: THE POLITICAL

SITUATION HAS BECOME SOMEWHAT MORE INTERESTING BECAUSE OF THE WEAKENING SITUATION OF THE REGIME AND SIGNS OF INTER-SERVICE TENSIONS, AND WE CAN IMAGINE SEVERAL POSSIBLE FUTURE LINES OF DEVELOPMENT:

A) MORE OF THE SAME WITH THE RODRIGUEZ GOVERNMENT BECOMINGLY INCREASINGLY TIRED. THIS IS NOT AN UNLIKELY POSSIBILITY BECAUSE THE POLITICIANS, AS THEY ARE PRESENTLY ORGANIZED, DO NOT REALLY REPRESENT A SERIOUS POLITICAL THREAT SINCE THEY HAVE LITTLE REAL STRENGTH. POLITICAL PARTIES IN ECUADOR ARE SMALL, FRAGMENTED GROUPS TENDING TO REPRESENT INDIVIDUAL LEADERS. THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL RESTORATION FRONT, IF IT ACTUALLY HAPPENS, COULD CHANGE THIS SITUATION SINCE IT WOULD PRESENT THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT WITH A UNIFIED OPPOSITION FOR THE FIRST TIME. SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD PROBABLY FURTHER SHAKE THE REGIME'S CONFIDENCE.

B) A COUP WITHIN THE COUP: A JUNTA, DIFFERENT MILITARY LEADERS, OR THE ARMY ALONE MIGHT MOVE IN TO REPLACE THE INEFFECTIVE RODRIGUEZ ADMINISTRATION TO PRESERVE THE REPUTATION OF THE ARMED FORCES. THE
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DIFFICULTY WITH THIS POSSIBILITY IS THAT NO OBVIOUS LEADER OR JUNTA IS IN SIGHT. MOST OF THE SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS ARE ALREADY COMMITTED TO THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATION. STILL, THIS POSSIBILITY SHOULD NOT BE RULED OUT, ALTHOUGH IT DOES NOT SEEM VERY LIKELY AT THE MOMENT.

C) A JUNIOR OFFICERS' COUP: SUCH ACTION WOULD NOT BE TYPICAL OF ECUADOR. WE HAVE NOT HEARD OF ANY SUCH PLOTTING, ALTHOUGH WE DO KNOW THAT SOME JUNIOR OFFICERS THINK THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS DONE VERY LITTLE. SUCH A COUP, IF IT WERE TO HAPPEN, WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURE FOR ECUADOR AND WOULD PROBABLY RESULT IN A MORE LEFTIST AND MUCH MORE NATIONALISTIC REGIME. AT THE MOMENT WE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT SUCH A COUP IS A LIKELY POSSIBILITY.

D) A TRANSITIONAL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT: THIS IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT PONCE HAS IN MIND; AND, GIVEN ECUADOREAN HISTORY, IT IS NOT AN UNLIKELY ONE IN THE LONG RUN. IF THE RODRIGUEZ GOVERNMENT CONTINUES AS IT IS NOW, IT BECOMES EVER MORE LIKELY SINCE THE PRESTIGE OF THE MILITARY IS BOUND TO SUFFER FROM CONTINUED INEFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT.

11. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT WILL BE A DECISION OF THE MILITARY. IT DEPENDS UPON HOW THEY DECIDE TO TRY TO SAVE THEIR

DIMINISHING PRESTIGE: BY DIRECT ACTION OR BY RESIGNATION.
AN INITIAL ATTEMPT AT DIRECT ACTION CANNOT BE EXCLUDED,
ALTHOUGH NO NEW, FRESH LEADERSHIP IS OBVIOUSLY IN SIGHT.
THUS, IN THE LONG RUN, PONCE MAY WELL BE RIGHT.

12. BUT THE PROCESS OF CHANGE MAY BE MORE DIFFICULT
THAN IT WAS WITH THE LAST JUNTA. THIS MILITARY GOVERN-
MENT HAS A STRONGER COMMITMENT TO REMAINING IN POWER.
IT HAS PENETRATED MORE DEEPLY INTO THE BUREAUCRACY AND
HAS ANNOUNCED FAR REACHING PLANS AND HAS STATED THAT IT
INTENDS TO REMAIN IN POWER UNTIL THEY ARE FULFILLED.
THE PRESTIGE OF THE MILITARY IS MORE INVOLVED THIS
TIME. WHILE IT APPEARS TO US THAT THIS COMMITMENT IS
WEAKENING THROUGH FATIGUE, CORRUPTION, AND RELUCTANCE TO
SERVE, THE CIVILIANS WILL PROBABLY FIND IT HARDER TO
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REMOVE THIS REGIME THAN THEY DID THE JUNTA, BECAUSE THE
MILITARY WILL FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO GET OUT GRACEFULLY.
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